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ABSTRACT

Even Start is a family literacy and support program for families with young children. This paper identifies several characteristics of adult learners in order to suggest effective approaches for working with adults to improve literacy skills. The first section presents five case studies illustrating adults with different histories, circumstances, and motivations for improving language and literacy skills. The second section argues that adult learners are diverse in the areas of age, learning abilities and challenges, and culture, which requires adult educators to create opportunities that will be meaningful for different adult learners. The third section proposes that despite much diversity, there are also shared characteristics, including experience, managing changing environments, and parenthood. Meaningful curricula should therefore include real-world, task-oriented transactions and work that reflects values, behavior, and beliefs. The fourth section discusses developing literacy and strengthening families by: (1) addressing the needs of adults through learner-guided curriculum; (2) using experience and existing knowledge to construct new knowledge; (3) creating channels for sharing knowledge between generations, and; (4) creating a sense of community between learners. The final section addresses implications for practice of those points raised in the fourth section. This section provides specific questions that will lead practitioners and educators of adults into successful program development and planning. (Contains 24 references.) (SD)

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Adult Education

Profiles in Diversity and Strength

BY DR. GAIL WEINSTEIN-SHR, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH,
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

One in a Series of Papers for Even Start Project Managers

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Adults have different histories, circumstances, and purposes for wanting to develop and improve language and literacy skills. What is similar is a range of personal and cultural resources, as well as a strong drive to create something positive for themselves and their families despite the obstacles. Each adult striving to gain literacy skills provides a challenge for Even Start practitioners. How can a practitioner create a curriculum that provides a meaningful experience for each adult? How can a practitioner be sure that adult learners in their program have an opportunity to move toward their goals? The purpose of this paper is to identify several characteristics of adult learners to suggest effective approaches for working with adults to improve literacy skills.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENT LIVES

Before we embark on a discussion of those characteristics and approaches, the following stories will provide some context for the life and learning experiences of a variety of adults.

David's life is finally going well. That was not always the case. In tenth grade, he was in a car accident, incurring injuries that kept him from running track, the only thing that mattered to him. Without his own athletic prowess to fall back on, David dropped out of school.

In his early twenties, David worked only occasionally, and spent most of his time feeling sorry for himself. After years of languishing, something happened that would change David's life. His brother, after losing his wife, committed suicide, leaving behind two children. In Navajo tradition it is customary for the mother's brother to act as disciplinarian, guide, and mentor to his sister's children. There is no such expectation of the father's brother. But these children were alone in the world, and custom or no custom, David would not see his niece and nephew abandoned to their fates. David's mother agreed with him — these children had already seen too much sadness. The son and mother decided to raise the children together.

For their sakes, David decided to start again. He sought to resume his education, aiming first to complete his GED. David became the first reservation member to be hired at a solar energy plant. His GED teacher recalls a time when he brought her a mathematical problem in volume that he needed to solve for his job.

Now David has married and has had a child of his own, whom he raises with his brother's children. He is grateful to his niece and nephew for the impetus they gave him to make a new life and to learn skills for a purpose beyond himself.

Diego was born in Mexico. He had been a farm laborer in California for many years by the time he met Sylvia and married her. Her family was still in Texas, where she was born. They were too far away to help out. Diego put in long hours working for the mushroom industry, adding income by washing dishes to support his family. He never told his children that he could not read or write, either in English or in Spanish. Now that the oldest is five

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years old, Diego's lack of literacy skills is becoming harder to hide. It was Sylvia who first agreed to work one-on-one with a tutor, and who encouraged her husband to join her in learning to read.

The local Even Start director noticed that Sylvia and Diego's dreams began small, but the dreams have grown as the family's literacy resources have grown. When asked, adults starting out in her Even Start Project often tell about their wishes and dreams with descriptions like these: "I want my kids to do better in school" or "I don't want to look dumb in front of my kids." Now that Sylvia and Diego have their own home, bought with "sweat equity," their dreams have grown accordingly. Sylvia has become a supervisor at the mushroom plant. Diego has moved toward his degree, shifting his own dreams along the way. He now believes that a home with plumbing and electricity is not the goal, but rather this is the least that his children should expect for themselves as they begin their own journeys toward a life that Diego swears must surpass the trials he has known.

Choun farmed with her family in the fields of Cambodia. She was nine years old when her family began the terrible trek out of Pol Pot's Cambodia. Of her family of seven, only she and her sister survived the ordeal. Now she lives in Oakland, California with her husband and her four sons, ranging in age from 4-10 years old. In a series of discussions with her English as a Second Language teacher, Choun has spoken about some of her most pressing concerns:

"Everybody, all the parents are worried about gangs. We talk about that. We don't know what to do. You can see them out the window! They stand together in the parking lot. We walk by them every time. I'm really scared about my kids. You know, I have four sons. When they get older, maybe the gangs will talk to them. Maybe they want my kids to cut school. Maybe they want them to fight, to drink.

"I just take my sons to church every week. The church takes good care of my children. The church says they must cut their hair and wear good clothes. I hope my sons will grow up right, and listen to me and listen to the church."

Darla, an African American woman, had already begun living with Desmond when she was 14 years old. By the time she was 28, she had six kids, two of whom are now teenagers. When Desmond became disabled, his frustrations multiplied, and he also became abusive. Once when Desmond got angry, he took a sledge hammer and, in his fury, broke apart the family washer/dryer. Darla knew that her husband's rage was a danger to herself and her children. When a flyer about a family literacy program came home in a newsletter from her children's school, Darla made the decision. She knew she had to get out of this abusive situation. With the support of a local women's health clinic, Darla relocated and started in Even Start.

It took Darla two years to get her GED. The owner of the local grocery store where she worked, impressed with her personality and her ability to draw people to her, invited her to become the team-leader of the cashiers. She knew it was a start, but she also knew it wasn't enough for her. Darla now works as a co-teacher in program in early childhood development issues. Now, at the age of 35, she is ready to start college.

Pao Joua is a retired soldier and is considered a war hero in his community. Like 70,000 Hmong refugees who resettled in the United States, he fled the hills of Laos, where his native language was not written until three decades ago. Pao Joua is a grandfather many times over, and is considered both an elder and a leader by many members of Philadelphia's Hmong community.

Pao Joua attended classes at the community college, but dropped out after only one semester.

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His English literacy skills, while minimal, allow him to scan the newspapers for articles about Southeast Asia, which he then passes along to more literate men in the community. Besides keeping current on events in his homeland, Pao Joua is interested in developing his literacy, among other things, to be able to record traditional Hmong courtship songs so that his sons can learn what they will need to know to be able to find desirable brides.

ADULT LEARNERS: DIVERSITY EPITOMIZED

David, Diego, Choen, Darla, and Pao Joua represent a range of circumstances and goals that learners bring to their work with us. This section reviews three kinds of diversity that are especially important to consider when designing and delivering adult education services.

Diversity in Age.

One way in which adult learners may vary is in their years. Darla, described above, was a mother at the age of 15. Some adults who participate in adult education programs are hardly more than children themselves who find themselves in adult roles despite their own youth and inexperience. Most adult education programs are designed to foster self-sufficiency and to encourage adults to become financially independent and contributing members of society, and are thus oriented toward young adults who are employment bound.

Consider some of the individuals in the other introductory scenarios. Pao Joua, in contrast to Darla, has a strong support network, and approaches his own learning with the wisdom of long experience and with a clear sense of what he wants for himself. He has lived through war and resettlement, through the births, marriages, and other rites of passage of his children and grandchildren. There are several reasons that older adults like Pao Joua among others may play an increasing role in adult education and Even Start programs. The first reason is demographic. While discussions of population change tend to focus largely on ethnic and racial shifts, it is often overlooked that the most significant change is related to the age structure of the population (Weinstein-Shr, 1995). This demographic change affects all racial and ethnic groups. The so-called aging or graying of America is a trend that will continue well into the next century (SSCA et al, 1991). Elders will simply be a much more prevalent part of our human landscape. In 1900, only about one in 25 Americans was over 65. By 2040, one out of every four or five Americans will be over 65.

One consequence of these demographic trends for communities is that older adults will comprise a larger portion of consumers, workers, and recipients of services. Their collective wisdom, the potential resource of their time, as well as the growing impact of elders' needs will be felt in every area of family and community life. The roles of older adults are also changing as grandparents are more often placed in the position of providing child care. In strong and well-grounded families, elders provide a source of memory, family history, and an anchor in some of the basic values that guide individuals on their challenging life journeys.

Diversity in Learning Abilities and Learning Challenges.

All adults are stronger in some skill areas than others, and each of us has more facility in learning or mastering certain kinds of things than others. The concept of multiple intelligences, articulated by Gardner (1983), provided formal research on what we know intuitively — that different people have different kinds of strengths. As Ross-Gordon (1989) points out, we tend to gravitate toward work and

recreational activities that allow us to use our strengths, while minimizing those that emphasize our weaknesses. She illustrates, for example, that those who are not strong in areas of gross motor and perceptual motor abilities may avoid athletic activities, welcome word processors as a substitute for handwriting, and spend more time than others learning those motor skills that are essential. These weaknesses do not lead to any significant barriers to managing a variety of contexts.

However, there is a group of individuals for whom difficulty in certain domains of learning interferes with their performance in academic, occupational, or social contexts. Learning disabilities among the adult population are far more prevalent than was once believed. While definitions of disabilities have been evolving over the last two decades, most definitions emphasize three elements: 1) a discrepancy between ability and performance; 2) an absence of other primary handicapping conditions; and 3) factors intrinsic to the individual (Johnson and Blalock 1987). The assembly of delegates of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, approved the following definition:

> Specific learning disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origins which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and nonverbal abilities. Specific learning disabilities (SLD) exists as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and daily living activities. (ACLD Description, 1986, p15).

There is little information about how many adults struggle with such disabilities. The first estimates about learning disabilities among adults were made by projection based on the percentage of school-age students who were thought to have SLD. Of course, with changing definitions and limited assessment tools, any estimates are problematic. According to Hutto (1995), of all GED candidates, seven percent, or approximately 43,000 people, reported having a disability in 1991, with one in five reporting that they had a specific learning disability.

While not much data is available about this important group, it is clear that many adults with learning disabilities have become quite resourceful in managing daily life, despite the challenges they have in processing information. The coping strategies these adults have developed are a resource for learning that can be tapped and nurtured.

Cultural Diversity.

The fabric of the American humanscape is as textured as her landscape. From one region to the next, from rural to urban centers, our communities are as distinct as their histories of the peoples that have settled in them over the centuries. Cultural diversity is an inevitable aspect of America's changing demographics. Differences in cultural heritage lead to different perceptions and practices of child rearing, of parental and familial roles; it also leads to different expectations for learning, goal attainment, and use of resources.

By best estimates, there are as many as 14 million adults in the United States having origins outside of the United States. Immigrants over the centuries have brought skills, talents, and fresh perspectives to their neighbors in the United States. There is little doubt that life in another country and another culture provides people with a larger repertoire of experiences and perceptions for solving problems.

Despite the cultural riches that newcomers bring, many of these immigrants have serious difficulty speaking, understanding, reading, or writing the English language. English learners may show proficiency in one skill area (e.g., oral fluency or reading/writing) but be more limited in another. Because of limited availability, accessibility, or

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appropriateness of some English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults in the United States, only a small fraction of those who wish to learn English have realistic opportunities to do so (McKay and Weinstein-Shr, 1994). According to demographers, white Anglos are expected to become the "minority" by the year 2000. The consequences of our changing linguistic and cultural landscape are felt in every American workplace, school, and community.

The results are also felt powerfully within immigrant families themselves in many ways. In language minority families, language and literacy play a particularly poignant role in exacerbating normal stresses among generations. Because children are usually in a position to learn English more quickly than their parents, roles in immigrant families are often reversed: adults depend on children to translate and solve language and literacy-related problems. In addition, native language loss in immigrant families impedes communication in families which can lead to disastrous consequences. In some families, where parents work and children spend all day at school and/or day care, it is sometimes the case that parents have no opportunity to learn English, while children are never exposed to the language of their parents' homeland. In this situation it can and sometimes does come to pass that parents and children no longer share a language of communication.

Diversity among adults in language and culture, abilities and disabilities, as well as age and generation are all sources of great challenge for adult educators. But this diversity can also be the source of interest in our daily work, as well as our pleasure and growth as professionals and as human beings.

WORKING WITH ADULTS: DIRECTIONS IN ADULT EDUCATION

Several realities and trends in adult education will come into play as program designers, administrators, and staff work to create opportunities for adult learners that are relevant and meaningful.

Unity in Diversity.

While adults come to educational programs with a wide range of resources and needs, there are some characteristics that they all share. The first is experience: by simply growing up and managing their lives, adults have gained life experiences, well-developed views of the world, and strategies for managing. Malcolm Knowles was among the first to articulate the importance of this concept for adult education. He posited a theory of andragogy, defined as the "art and science of helping adults learn," as opposed to pedagogy, which by definition, refers to the teaching of children.

A second characteristic shared by adult learners, regardless of their regional or ethnic heritage, is the set of challenges they face in managing American life in the nineties. A truism that has not changed from the time of Hegel is his observation that the only thing that is certain and unchanging is change itself. In the dawn of what is coming to be known as the "information age," we are faced with adjusting to rapid changes in technology that affect every aspect of life and livelihood. In addition to the changes inherent in managing modern life, adults who have been uprooted from other countries and other lives must also face enormous language and cultural change at the same time. Uprooted or not, all of us must constantly cope with the onslaught of changing circumstances.

Third, because of the structure of Even Start and other family literacy programs, all adults involved have gone through the rites of passage of parenting, and have struggled with the challenges of raising children in a difficult world. Any parent, regardless of race, foreign or locally-born, older or younger — each of us, learner and teacher alike, wants a decent future for our own children. The challenge of diversity among learners is well balanced by the power of our common desires as human beings who love our children.

Trends in Adult Education Research and Curricula.

Since the time that Knowles started the conversation, research in adult education has explored two general sets of questions. The first set is framed by the field of cognitive psychology, and deals with ways in which adults process information and take on new learning tasks. Over the last two decades, there has been a movement away from the notion of a single "intelligence quotient" (IQ) toward a view of multiple aspects of intelligence (e.g. Gardner, 1983), as well as a recognition of individual learning styles (Smith, 1982) and strategies (Feilenz, 1989). Metacognition, or the ability to think about thinking, as well as memory are among the foci of further research on strategies in adult learning processes (for a review of literature on cognitive psychology and adult learning, see Fellenz and Conti, 1989).

The second set of questions is framed by scholars of social and political contexts for learning. Issues such as racism, discrimination, employment, housing, health care, and the environment have clear impact on adult learning, and are beyond the scope of problem-solving on an individual basis. Rather, these are issues that must be addressed collectively.

The notion of praxis was introduced by Freire (1970) to describe the alternating process of reflection and action. For this process to be activated, adult learners must have an opportunity to reflect on their own experience as part of their evaluation of new information and analysis of their context. Emphases on critical reflection (Brookfield, 1986), culture (Barnouw, 1987), education for social action (Horton, 1989; Anorve, 1989) and participatory research in which learners work to research their own situations and generate new knowledge (Fingeret, 1989), are among the issues that have been discussed by those focused on contexts for adult learning.

Curricula and Conceptions of Literacy.

Conceptions of literacy inform all curricula. With a conception of *literacy as skills*, literacy is often equated to performance on tests that are correlated with K-12 levels. According to Lytle and Wolfe (1989), despite widespread criticism, this is the most pervasive model used in curricula for adult education, and is characterized by teaching of reading and writing broken down into component parts, and taught sequentially with emphasis on coding and decoding.

Literacy as tasks is the way that Lytle and Wolfe describe approaches to literacy which focus on performance of representative daily tasks for specific real-world transactions. This corresponds with competency-based curricula, in which learners work toward mastery of specific competencies for managing daily life. In family literacy programs, competency-based curricula often include topics such as how to read children's report cards, how to interact with teachers at school, or how to help children with homework. Often, the competencies that are evi-

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dent in published family literacy materials reflect competencies that school personnel have identified as important for parents. These may or may not be those that are most desired by learners themselves.

Literacy as critical reflection is an orientation associated with those who emphasize the social and political contexts for literacy instruction. With this perspective, literacy is viewed as a process of interpreting the world and developing a consciousness of commonly held values, behaviors, and beliefs as socially and culturally constructed. This view of literacy is reflected in participatory curricula, in which learners themselves identify problems, and through cycles of reflection and action, seek collective solutions to shared problems, usually through social change.

In family literacy programs, like in any other adult programs, these emphases are not mutually exclusive. If learners are provided with an opportunity to identify key issues (through participatory techniques), they themselves can identify goals for what they want to be able to do with language or literacy (competencies). Within a learner-centered framework, it becomes the instructor's role to work with learners to identify their own goals, and to facilitate mastery of skills and competencies that learners choose to help them move toward their own dreams.

DEVELOPING LITERACY AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

To meet the needs of adults as parents and as learners, and to provide curricula that develop literacy skills while strengthening families, several directions show promise (adapted from Weinstein-Shr, 1993).

Needs of adults, as they themselves define them, are addressed.

Participatory educators suggest that in order for adults to develop literacy skills for addressing issues in their own lives, they must have an opportunity to identify and label those issues. Inviting learners to guide us in developing curriculum, however, is not always straightforward. Many Southeast Asian mothers, for example, say they are concerned that their children no longer like their cooking. Concerns that may seem trivial are often "codes" for more serious issues concerning adults, like losing authority over older children. It is important to note that even the most sympathetic administrators and teachers may have priorities that do not match those of adult learners. While a program may focus on early childhood issues, for example, parents such as Choun (who was introduced in an opening scenario) may be most concerned about pre-teens and the imminent urban dangers of gangs or drugs. A program will be more or less effective to the degree that the participant s most pressing concerns are addressed.

Asking, watching, and listening are essential for learning about the realities of adult learners' lives. Learner writing, language experience stories, and interviews, collected in English or in the case of immigrants, translated from adult learners' native language, are all rich potential sources of information about the family or parenting concerns of adults. Adult learners themselves can provide input in planning, in the ongoing development of curriculum, as well as in the daily enactment of classroom instruction. It is also critical to open channels of communication through knowledgeable community leaders who can be important allies — and sources of information.

If learners are given an opportunity to set goals for themselves, they can get most from their learning experiences if they are also given opportuni-

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ties to monitor their own progress toward those goals. As Diego's story in the introduction illustrates, as learners expand their repertoire of knowledge and behaviors, the possibilities expand, and new goal posts often come into view. Similarly, strong programs also have systematic and ongoing opportunities to look at their overall educational goals, to monitor progress toward them, and to make adjustments in either the path or in the goals themselves as learners bring the programs to life.

The role of experience and existing knowledge is recognized in construction of new knowledge.

You may recall the words of Choun:

> "You can see [the gangs] out the window! They stand together in the parking lot. We walk by them every time. I'm really scared about my kids. You know, I have four sons. When they get older, maybe the gangs will talk to them. Maybe they want my kids to cut school. Maybe they want them to fight, to drink."

These words have become the basis for a language and literacy lesson. As those who use a language experience approach can attest, the task of decoding a new symbol system is more manageable when learners read from a story that they themselves have told. But more than this, as learners' stories become part of the curriculum, the process of telling, shaping, and owning the stories become part of the process of becoming literate.

It may seem ironic that familiarity and comfort enable growth and change, but many intuitive examples come to mind. When children are secure in their parents' presence, they feel freer to wander off and explore unknown territory. When adults are proud of their own native culture, they are more successful at adding a second language and culture (Weinstein-Shr 1993). Decades have passed since Knowles emphasized the wisdom of beginning with adults' experience and building on what they know For learners of any age to develop language and literacy skills, they must have an opportunity to acknowledge what they know and to build on it. As learners' stories become part of the written record, and as their experiences inform discussions, it becomes possible to process alternatives and imagine new possibilities.

Channels for sharing knowledge between generations are nurtured.

While research on literacy uncovers a myriad of functions, little attention has been given to the role of language and literacy in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Stories of the past, folk tales, proverbs, and memories of family life are all important vehicles adults may use for giving children a sense grounding in their own history and values to live by. When a family has been uprooted, when more than one language is spoken in the household, or when parents, grandparents, and grandchildren have little opportunity to spend time together, these channels for transmission of culture from old to young are more likely to be interrupted.

As children become the translators or decoders for adults, they are often in a position to provide information to their parents. Children also have a vested interested in helping their parents to understand their own situations, including the demands placed on them by peers or by schools. Clearly, adults have important stories to tell children — but children also have important stories for adults. Effective family literacy programs can create channels for those stories to be told, and can foster the nurturing of both native and English language resources for communication between the generations.

Adults whose knowledge and wisdom are valued are in a better position to support their children in school and elsewhere; they are also in a better position to be helped by their children without having their dignity or their role as parent threatened. Programs that incorporate oral history

and exploration of native language and culture as part of the curriculum create a strong base for adding new cultural information and values while strengthening families and communities.

Community is fostered between learners and practitioners.

A father with two part-time jobs wonders aloud what he can offer his sons that can compete with the lure of big money on the streets. A Puerto Rican grandmother hears a Chinese woman complain that she feels like a stranger in her own house because she doesn't understand when her grandchildren speak English. A Cambodian mother tells of her son's threat to call the police if his father disciplines him. There are no easy answers in managing family life in a stressful world, but when adults turn to each other to compare experiences about their work, their children's schools, discipline, community services, language use at home, or any number of issues, they learn that their problems are not individual. When adult learners share experiences, they can begin the process of reflection and collective problem-solving. At these moments, learners discover that they are not alone, and that their dilemmas are shared by others. Family literacy programs seem an extraordinarily appropriate forum for this process to begin.

Project work is an exciting way to foster collaboration among learners. Projects can be small, such as collectively writing a letter to the editor about an issue of common concern or making a "skills bank" for trading help. Projects can also be more extensive, such as collectively compiling a book of native folk tales to use in their children's pre-schools, or creating a community resource book for other parents. Project-based work is an approach to language and literacy development that is gaining currency as learners are engage in authentic tasks with the help of teachers and one another.

Family educators are also learners, often doing pioneering work in uncharted territory. Comparison of experience with other family literacy providers, both within and across programs can help us learn about the adult learners we serve, and inevitably about what works and what doesn't. With the collective wisdom of our professional community, we can find support and wisdom for the challenges that we face in our exciting work.

While both learners and teachers prosper in community with peers, learners and teachers also have much to learn from one another. In her summary of adult education tradition, Vella notes that "adults have enough life experience to be in dialogue with any teacher, about any subject, and will learn new knowledge or attitudes or skills best in relation to that life experience" (p3). While the power of dialogue is framed here in terms of benefit to the learner, any adult educator who loves his or her work can testify to the other side of the equation. Interaction with learners, with a true stance of listening and learning, can only result in a deepening understanding of ourselves, of the teaching and learning process, and of the world we share.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In order to provide family literacy education that strengthens families and that makes learners' lives and concerns central to the process of developing language and literacy, it may be helpful to consider the four questions below.

- ***How are the needs of adults, as they themselves define them, addressed?***

Which community leaders and key players have you identified to give you information about learners you wish to serve?

What are the primary concerns of the adults in your program about parenting and about family life? How can you find out more?

How are the adults targeted for your program invited to express their concerns and interests, both in the planning of the program and throughout the program both inside and outside their classes?

Who are bilingual resources and community members for paid or volunteer work in your program that can talk with learners in the way and/or languages learners know best?

Do the language teaching materials in the program reflect the concerns that adult learners raise? How can you collect or create new materials in response to expressed learner concerns and needs?

Are learner narratives used in the language and literacy classroom?

For competency-based literacy or parenting curricula, how will learners be offered the opportunity to choose which competencies are most important to them?

At what points in the program will learners have an opportunity to set and reset their own learning goals, and to monitor their progress toward them?

- ***How is the role of existing knowledge recognized in construction of new knowledge?***

What opportunities are provided for adult learners or families to discuss how they did things in their communities or countries of origin?

How can your program provide opportunities for adults to evaluate for themselves, in discussion with peers, which strategies for living to keep, and which strategies to change?

What information is available to teachers and administrators about parenting, schooling, and discipline in adult learners' communities or countries of origin?

How is parents' native language supported, and knowledge of place of origin encouraged for children?

How can parents' native language be used or demonstrably valued in the program?

- ***How are channels opened and nurtured for sharing knowledge between generations?***

What opportunities are provided in the curriculum for adults to remember and document the past?

What opportunities are provided for children in the program to hear about or imagine what life was like in the parents' past?

What opportunities are provided to use folk tales, oral history, proverbs, or other media for transmitting cultural values?

What role do family or community elders play in the program?

- ***How is community fostered among learners and practitioners?***

When do adult learners in this program have an opportunity to share experiences with one another?

What opportunities are provided for collective problem-solving among participants?

How can learners and reflections of adult learners be made available to other learners in the present or future program, and to other adults in other programs?

Do practitioners have an opportunity to discuss successes, concerns and insights on a regular basis as part of the job (i.e., on paid staff time)?

What time is built in for team-building and fun, both for learners in the classroom and for practitioners at work?

How can learners and reflections of program personnel made available, in some form, to personnel within the present or future program, and to other practitioners in other programs?

Addressing these questions can be on-going part of program planning and work as our knowledge of the families we serve deepens and as we gain ways to enter dialogue with adults who enter our programs.

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Resources

This account by the program director of a family literacy program in Boston illustrates a participatory approach to family literacy and adult curriculum development. The account is especially helpful in providing concrete suggestions for learning about learner needs and goals. It has a companion piece, Talking shop, written by the teachers themselves. (Nash, A. Rhum, M. McGrail, L and Gomez-Sanford, R (1992)

Holt, D (ed) (1994). *Assessing success in family literacy projects*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, McHenry IL.

Alternative assessment, unlike standardized tests, can be linked directly to the goals and curriculum of a literacy project, giving project staff immediate feedback for planning subsequent learning activities. With an emphasis on four alternative assessment approaches — surveys, interviews, observation measures and performance samples — this handbook gives literacy project a staff working with language minority learners the means to gain accurate and comprehensive information about learners' progress and overall project effectiveness.

Vella, J. (1994). *Learning to listen, Learning to Teach: The power of dialogue in educating adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

The author draws on extensive personal experience to summarize a set of basic principles of adult learning that transcend cultural differences. The principles include: seeing the learner as a decision maker in the learning process; building relationships for open communication; inviting participation by learners in goal setting through needs assessment; honoring cultural perspectives; and realizing the accountability of the teacher to learners. Each principle is shared through engaging stories that provide practical applications for teachers of adult students.

Weinstein-Shr, G. and Quintero, F. (eds) (1994). *Immigrant learners and their families: Literacy to connect the generations*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, McHenry IL.

This book is divided into three sections: program design with a focus on collaboration; curriculum design with a focus on learner strengths; and assessment with attention to both learner and program goals. The book provides examples from family literacy programs as well as child and adult-centered programs that reach across the generations while developing language and literacy skills.

Wrigley, H. (1992). *Bring literacy to life*. San Diego: Dominie Press, Inc.

A blend of theory and practice, this book is meant to help practitioners and programs for adults make informed decisions about teaching literacy in their own particular context. It included ten curriculum modules written by teachers in the field to illustrate some of the best practices.